



ADVANTAGE OF 90 MINUTES LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN EARLY GRADE CLASSES: MY EXPERIENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF MAYURBHANJ DISTRICT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Language is considered to be the mirror of the Society. It is the vehicle of communication. Researchers have recognized the importance of language and literacy in preparing children to succeed in school. Early literacy plays a key role in enabling the kind of early learning experiences that research shows are linked with academic achievement, reduced grade retention, higher graduation rates, and enhanced productivity in adult life. Considering the significance of language in early grades, CARE India, an International Development Organization started an intervention for enhancing the reading skill of children in 516 Government primary schools of Mayurbhanj district through its "START EARLY :READ IN TIME project since the year 2014 till 2019. A study conducted by CARE India prior to the Intervention revealed that less time was given to language classes in schools particularly in early grades, which resulted in the poor reading skill of children.

Keeping this in view, CARE India tested an innovation and took further initiatives for implementation of an effective 90 minutes language period especially in class-I and class-II. The objective was to facilitate all the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing concurrently in the same class. The extension of time period for language teaching and the concurrent practice of all the language skills in the same class improved the reading skill of children in early grades. This Paper says about the process adopted for execution of 90 minutes language period and the results achieved later. The success of the intervention is clearly stated in the study report prepared by a Delhi based Research Agency named "KAARAK".

KEY WORDS: Government primary schools, 90 minutes language Instruction, CARE India, Reading skill, children & early grade classes etc.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Reading is a complex and cognitive skill. According to various researches, it has been found that only 27.2% children of class-III can read class-II texts in India. In case of tribal children the percentage is much lower. Mayurbhanj is an Adivasi populated district, so there was a dire need for developing the reading ability of Government school children in a multi-lingual classroom situation especially in early grades. "Reading" itself includes certain sub-skills such as oral language development, phonological awareness, phonics/decoding, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, reading fluency and writing etc. "Reading" also needs an enabling environment like print rich environment, existence of a library & usage of REBUS books and exposure to oral expression of children in various learning platforms. Adding to these, it also requires enough time for children to practice variety of fun-making language learning activities of their interest. Considering the above facts, an initiative was taken by CARE India to implement 90 minutes language period in all the 516 primary schools especially in the early grade classes, which led to the improvement of reading skill of children to a larger extent.

2. STEPS TAKEN BY CARE INDIA TO IMPLEMENT 90 MINUTES LANGUAGE PERIOD:

CARE India with support from the District Education Department, started intervention in 48 Cluster Resource Centers and 516 schools. It adopted different approaches at different levels to achieve the desired goal. With this objective, it intervened in the clusters through cluster meetings.

2.1. At Cluster Level:

CARE India believed "there is a need to strengthen the Cluster Resource Centers as a continuous teacher development forum, where the teachers can meet regularly, generate resources, read relevant books and discuss on academic matters to build their own capacity. This, in turn can bring a great change in classroom transaction processes and children's learning".

Considering the importance of the cluster meetings, decision was taken to prepare a common Agenda template for the reference of the CRCCs. They were advised to prepare their own Agenda as per the need of the teachers. The Agenda were divided into 5 important sessions. All the sessions were designed sequentially and logically to get a definite outcome. There was a time limit for each session.

The dedicated language instruction teachers for early grade in a cluster were targeted through the forums. Each forum had a group of 20-25 teachers from all the primary schools in a cluster.

Consequently, this forum progressively built the perspective of teachers on educational and equity issues, developed enabling schools, developed conceptual understanding on subject specific competencies and content, improved clarity on instruction methods relevant to the discipline and level of the learner, helped in adopting child centric pedagogical methods and classroom management techniques, developed understanding on assessment indicators & approaches and

developed idea on creation of resources etc.



Cluster Forum meeting/Monthly Sharing Meeting (MSMs)

Apart from these, the teachers also got various opportunities to develop understanding on 90 minutes language period through rigorous discussion, demonstration, transaction and experimentation.

4.2. At School Level:

The schools in Mayurbhanj are located in remote Adivasi villages. There is a multi-lingual situation in each classroom but most of the teachers are from non-tribal background. Keeping this in view, CARE India introduced a mother-tongue based 90 minutes language period in the early grade classes to cater to the needs of the children. The teachers were supported on various aspects in terms of learning tribal languages, developing an enabling environment in classroom, developing instructional charts for own reference and implementing 90 minutes class for early grade children etc. For an effective implementation of 90 minutes language period in early grade classes, an enabling environment was also created in all the intervened schools.

Creation of Enabling Environment:

The following components were responsible for creating an enabling environment in schools.

- *Establishment of library and abundant use of bilingual/multilingual books-* The objective was to give an exposure to the children to have a bonding with books and languages.

- *Creation of print rich environment (Hanging/pasting of relevant, useful and contextual handwritten or printed materials inside and outside the classroom):* The environment was created to help the children foster skills needed for "reading" through different forms of print awareness activities.
- *Strengthening children's committees:* The children's committee (Library committee, sports committee or school environment committee etc.) is a democratic forum where the children can express their issues/concerns fearlessly and seek for solutions. The purpose for strengthening the committees was to provide an opportunity to the children for developing their oral language skill.
- *Organizing Morning Assembly (An everyday meeting place for children to express their feelings, emotions and views through various activities like Action song, storytelling, mute play etc. before the commencement of classes):* The objective of organizing Morning Assembly was to create a platform for the children for oral expression and vocabulary development etc.
- *Exclusive Reading Time (A dedicated time for teachers as well as children for reading together):* The significance for an exclusive reading time was to encourage the children to develop a reading habit to be the fluent readers later.

Implementation of 90 minutes Language Period:

Alongside continuous and comprehensive trainings at cluster levels, the teachers were also provided with regular onsite support at school level to implement 90 minutes language period in early grade classes. One sample time-plan was prepared to guide the teachers to prepare their own plans according to their classroom situation. The sample time-plan is stated below for reference.

90 Minutes Sample Time-plan (For class-I)

1. Warm-up Activity(Any activity that stimulates children to engage themselves in classroom process)- 5 minutes
2. Oral language Activity(Activities that improve the listening comprehension, oral expression and vocabulary skills of children)-20 minutes
3. Phonological Awareness/Sound discrimination Activity(Activities that help children in discriminating/manipulating different sounds of Sentences, words or letters)-10 minutes
4. Print Awareness Activity (Activities that associate the children with print materials, for example- familiarizing children with print materials such as books and word-picture cards etc.)-10 minutes
5. Vocabulary Development (Familiarizing children with new words from a chapter)-5 minutes
6. Phonics/Decoding (Sound and letter association activity, for example- pretend reading activity and spelling words/letters etc.)- 10 minutes
7. Reading fluency (Organizing many types of reading activities such as Read Aloud, Shared reading and Pair reading etc.)-10 minutes
8. Reading Comprehension (Organizing before reading, during reading and after reading activities)-10 minutes
9. Pre-writing activities (Coloring pictures, scribbling, jointing points and other activities related to fine motor development & eye-hand coordination etc.)-10 minutes

Besides the above sample time-plan, the teachers were given time to time suggestions regarding execution of 90 minutes plan. A sample time plan for class-II was also suggested, which is as follows.

90 minutes sample time plan (for class-II)

1. Oral language activity: 20 minutes
2. Vocabulary development: 5 minutes
3. Phonics/Decoding- 20 minutes
4. Reading fluency- 10 minutes
5. Reading comprehension activity-15 minutes
6. Writing activity (writing known words and alphabets etc.)-20 minutes

In both the sample time-plans, more time was assigned to oral language activities as this is considered to be the base for "reading" improvement. Emphasis was given to phonological and print awareness activities in class-I whereas, more focus was given to phonics/decoding activities in class-II. In the same way, more

time was given to reading comprehension and writing activities in class-II.



Implementation of 90 minutes language period in class room

While preparing the sample time-plan, adequate attention was given to children's listening time span, their interest, learning ability and learning needs etc. Adequate skill-based Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) were developed and used in the class room according to their requirement. The teachers used the mother-tongue of children and the state language in the class to make the children comfortable with the environment. There was no compulsion to implement the plan continuously for 90 minutes, rather flexibility was there for the teachers to alter the plan as per children's need or demand. There was a scope not only for implementation of 90 minutes language period but also for practicing all the skills of language concurrently in the same class. The combination of different types of play-based and fun-making activities created the interest of children in studies to a larger extent.

3. CONCLUSION:

In the conclusion, it can clearly be stated that the relentless efforts taken by CARE India at different level bore fruits at last. Preparation of TLMs, development of print rich materials, discussion on pedagogical issues & their solutions and demonstration of 90 minutes language period at cluster meetings strengthened the capacity of the teachers in a continuous manner.

Similarly, the organization of Morning Assembly activities for oral language development, establishment of library for having bonding with books, strengthening children's committees for oral expression, development of print rich environment for print awareness and adherence to an exclusive reading time paved the way for creating an enabling environment in the school.

The effective execution of an extended language period in early grade classes could be possible due to adoption of an appropriate child assessment process and preparation of an implementable lesson plan.

The early grade classes experienced all the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing concurrently with an abundant use of print rich materials, TLMs and REBUS books etc.

To sum up, the blending of an enabling environment in schools, capacity building of teachers in cluster meetings and an effective implementation of 90 minutes language period in early grade classes together brought positive changes in the classroom environment and improved the reading skill of children in the long run. The results are quite visible in the cluster and school study reports prepared by "KAARAK", a Delhi based research Agency.

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